



Photos by Airman Bradley Lail

Staff Sgt. Denim Beeler, 385th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron boom operator, guides an RC-135 from Offut Air Force Base, Neb., toward the boom during a routine refueling mission. Sergeant Beeler is a member of the 19th Air Refueling Group, 99th Air Refueling Squadron, Robins Air Force Base, Ga.



Airman 1st Class Joel Grudle, 385th EAMXS engine crew chief, unplugs an electricity charger from a KC-135 refueler which gives the aircraft a supply of electricity while it is on the ground. Airman Grudle is a member of the 22nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, McConnell Air Force Base, Kan.



Senior Airman Valerie Nikolaus, 385th EAMXS engine crew chief, checks the engines on a KC-135 refueler. Airman Nikolaus is a member of the 100th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Royal Air Force, Mildenhall, England.



The 385th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron overcomes challenges to ready aerial refueling aircraft ...

# On time, every time

By Staff Sgt. Shanda De Anda  
39th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

The 385th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron's mission is to provide and maintain mission-ready aircraft for sustained aerial refueling – on time, every time.

The 385th EAMXS overcomes several challenges to not only achieve that mission, but to surpass standards by accomplishing and maintaining a 98 percent departure reliability rate. The departure reliability rate is the percentage sorties that are launched as scheduled and not delayed because of maintenance.

"To maintain such a high departure reliability rate requires dedication, hard work and thoroughness in the maintenance practices of the Airmen who made this happen – they must get good fixes on the first try," said Capt. P. Scott Corman, 385th EAMXS commander.

Airmen of the EAMXS team also directly contribute to the global war on terrorism downrange.

"Our mission is critical to supporting operations both in Afghanistan and Iraq," Captain Corman said. "Strategic airlift going into and out of the theater requires aerial refueling to operate and that's what we provide 24-7."

The squadron illustrates the total-force concept in action. The 385th EAMXS team is comprised of 72 Airmen from 12 different Air Force specialty codes and several bases.

The lead unit is from McConnell Air Force Base, Kan., and arrived with three aircraft and about 50 percent of the squadron's Airmen, most of who have nearly completed their 60-day commitment,

which started in September. During the first 30 days of support, Airmen and aircraft hailed from MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., and were replaced with more than 20 Airmen and one aircraft from Robins AFB, Ga. Seven maintainers and one aircraft from Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, are also here on 30-day tours while guardsmen from Pittsburgh, McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base, Knoxville, Tenn., and Rickenbacker ANGB, Columbus, Ohio; and reservists from McConnell round out this diverse team.

"The leadership, professionalism and technical competence of our mid-level NCOs combines with the energy and enthusiasm of our young Airmen to create a synergy that just works," said Captain Corman. "Reservists and guardsmen are a fully and seamlessly integrated part of that team, and they have a lot of experience they bring to the team."

But every team has its challenges. The squadron's schedule is in constant flux as it is primarily dictated by the flying schedules of downrange aircraft, and the high operations tempo of maintaining several aircraft and a weekly average of 35 three-hour sorties, 106 flying hours and the delivery of about 2.4 million pounds of fuel are just some of the challenges these Airmen face.

"Equipment limitations and limited supplies are perhaps our greatest obstacles, yet these challenges yield some unique rewards," Captain Corman said.

At home station, heavy maintenance tasks are usually performed during a span of several shifts. This allows maintainers only a small glimpse of the whole repair process.

"Here, Airmen may perform a huge job

like overhauling a landing gear, replacing a fuel cell or changing an engine and one team gets the whole job," said Senior Master Sgt. Mark Clegg, 385th EAMXS superintendent. "It's a big task, but seeing it through to the end (helps Airmen) know they are part of the process that helps that aircraft get back out there to accomplish the mission."

"The environment we work in requires 12-hour shifts, sometimes more, and labor intensive work, but seeing these tasks through to completion makes it worth it," added Captain Corman. "For the Airmen, it's a great sense of accomplishment to tear an aircraft down so heavily, then build it back up and see it fly."



Airman 1st Class Terrell Frideger, 385th EAMXS inflight refueler, checks the oxygen tanks before a routine refueling mission. Airman Frideger is a member of the 19th Air Refueling Group, 99th Air Refueling Squadron, Robins Air Force Base, Ga.